



With the Rain, Strawberries and Cream by everybreatheverymove

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Summary: But El had smiled, and she'd kissed his cheek with sticky lips, and Mike had been a total goner. [Petrichor: a pleasant smell that frequently accompanies the first rain after a long period of warm, dry weather.]

With the Rain, Strawberries and Cream

By the time August finally rolls around, Mike Wheeler has decided that summer is his second favorite season of the year.

The party is gathered in his basement one afternoon when he comes to this conclusion; a can of soda in one hand and El's half-eaten lollipop stick in the other.

She's busy braiding Max's hair just the way Nancy had showed her the week before, when she'd come over to spend time with Mike and the older Wheeler sibling had whisked her away before he could catch a glimpse of her.

Explaining how it would 'get in the way' of her work - but mostly after Max had refused to have her hair braided if it meant getting a sticky, goopy lolly stuck in there - El had been ready to throw the stick in the trashcan, until Will had kindly reminded her that Hopper probably wouldn't let her have another for a good week or so.

And so, proving that chivalry wasn't dead just yet, Mike offered to hold it for her. In retrospect, he probably could have just put it back in the wrapper in the meantime, or ran upstairs and stolen a fresh one from Holly's special treat draw.

But El had smiled, and she'd kissed his cheek with sticky lips, and Mike had been a total goner.

"Done." El claps her hands together, proud and smiling.

"Thank you!" Max makes to stand up, hands automatically flying up to her hair to finger the braids. She pulls at the ends of the two plaits, adjusting their tightness, "I mean, *thanks*." She offers the brunette a slight smile, and El returns the gesture.

Not a second later and Max is already out the door, joining Lucas and Dustin in a weird game of tag. The boys are just rolling around tackling each other on the front patch of grass outside the house - like a pair of idiots, as Mike had so affectionately called them earlier - and Max is stood with her hands on her hips, shouting instructions

and tips and obscenities like some sort of wrestle-tag-thing expert. Will is sat with his back against the side of the house, legs crossed Indian-style, notepad in hand as he watches the scene unfold, keeping score.

It's been stupidly war for several weeks now, ever since the group were let out on summer break. Since then, it's been nothing but ducking into the public pool in the early hours of the day, spending sunny afternoons at the quarry, and pulling all-nighters in Mike's basement, trying to avoid the heat.

His face is still tickled crimson from the slight sunburn he'd caught a couple of days earlier - when his mom had told him to lather up with sunscreen and Mike had proceeded not to. El, however, was honey-tanned, sun-kissed and a total contrast to Mike's reddened pastiness.

(He's not jealous, he swears.)

"Do you wanna go outside?" Mike watches as she snatches the sweet stick back from him, puckering her lips over the pastel colored candy.

It pops against her mouth as she pulls it away, all teeth and dry lips. "It's gonna rain."

"It hasn't rained in like six weeks." He frowns.

El shrugs, giving him a look of "You'll see" as she reaches for his hands, pulling him up from his chair. Mike groans - audibly, dramatically - and the little grin on his face doesn't go unnoticed.

"Mike."

"Fine."

He follows after her as she heads outside, stepping over the threshold with ease. El keeps her teeth clenched around the lollipop stick, and her hand tightens around his wrist as they move to sit beside Will.

"Lucas winning again?"

There's a muffled "Never!" that comes from the mess of limbs on the grass then, and Dustin's fist flies free into the open air victoriously, as

though to mark his point.

Will snorts, "He's a point ahead." He tells them, tapping the end of his pencil on the page of his notebook rhythmically, "I mean, it's not like there's rules or anything but... if there was, he'd be a point ahead." The boy adds with a smile, nodding his head.

Mike grins, "It's been like five years. If they don't have rules by now, they never will."

"You're the paladin." El cuts in, resting a hand on Mike's arm. "You make the rules." She offers with a lowered gaze, focusing her eyes on Will's notebook.

"I am *not* coming up with rules for... this." Mike says, "No way in hell. I'm not getting involved."

"Rain."

"What?"

"Rain." She nods her heads toward Will, still staring at the pad in his hands. The boys follow her gaze, watching as small raindrops land on the lined page.

"Oh." Mike blinks, dares to look up and finds the sky darkened. "Finally." He breathes out.

El moves her free hand to her mouth then, pulling the empty candy stick from past her lips. She toys with it for a second, waits until heavier rain starts pouring before shoving it in her shorts' pocket.

"Son of a bitch!" Dustin exclaims then, stood with his head tilted up to the sky, his hands on his knees, seemingly bent over in exhaustion. "Just when I was in the lead, too."

Lucas shoves him then, a light push to his shoulder, "Dude, you've never been in the lead."

"Maybe if you idiots actually came up with some dos and don'ts then you'd know who was winning." Max pips up, placing a hand on the boys' backs as they head back inside the house, "You know, like

normal people do!"

"We're not normal, Maxine." Dustin whines, "When are you gonna learn that?"

"Okay," Will closes his notepad shut, interrupting the stream of voices coming from inside the house. "I'm going in before I catch a cold."

El pulls a face, moves to kneel at Mike's side, "It's summer."

"Yeah, but," Will tries, "I don't know, I think you can still get sick or something. My mom told me that once." He smiles, tucking the notepad under the flap of his shirt as he gets up, heads into the house.

"Okay." Mike moves to stand then, pushing up on the wet grass with his hands. He crouches, offers El's an extended hand. "Time to hop inside, Hopper." He wiggles his brows.

The brunette just rolls her eyes, reaching for his hand. She grabs him by the wrist, softly tugs on his arm until he's mere inches away from her, nose practically brushing against hers.

"What are you doing?"

With wide eyes, her cheeks flush despite the humidity's already glowing effect on her skin, and she leans in just a little bit more to press her forehead against his.

"Thank you."

"For summer." She nods once, twice, keeps her gaze locked on his. "Come rain or shine."

"You're... welcome?" Mike voices, breath catching as she ducks her head and kisses the corner of his mouth, sticky sweetness still present.

Within second, she's pulled away and rising to her feet, dragging him up alongside her.

By the time August finally rolls around, Mike Wheeler has decided

that summer is his second favorite season of the year.

For the most part, it's lazy afternoons spent in the company of friends, in the sweltering hot heat of the sun or the stupid, humid embrace of his basement. For the most part, it's him pretending his sunburn doesn't sting like a bitch as he lies in the sun the next day, because he can.

But his absolute favorite part of summer is when it rains. If he were to pick at the grass, he'd be left with stubbly, damp little blades sticking to his fingertips. If he were to touch the bark of a tree, he'd be greeted with a disgustingly moist, awfully comforting feeling of softness against the pads of his fingers.

If he were to touch his own lips, he'd find them to be sticky and sweet like strawberries and cream, courtesy of El's soft kiss.

If he were to kiss her, right now in the midst of a warm downpour, he'd find himself lost for words - the combination of Earth's natural petrichor and El's candied sweetness rendering him mute.

Summer is his second favorite season of the year; but only because autumn brought him *her*.